No. 44

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Alice took a hold of the electric curling iron and went to work. It did not prove to be much of a task, however, because Betty's hair was naturally wavy.

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ALICE PROCTER was indeed surprised to find Betty at the Procter estate on Ashland Boulevard. And Betty in turn was also surprised to see Alice and overjoyed when Alice told her she would be hunted no more be the police. And at the mention of her husband, Bob Harding, Betty could scarcely keep from dancing from joy.

"My husband," she exclaimed. "Oh, how glad I will be to see him again."

"You have a perfect right to be glad, for Bob is a fine young fellow," said the older sister. "But he is more than that. He is generally regarded as a hero, for he saved a child from burning to death during a terrible fire."

"He did that?" cried Betty, her cheeks flushed with pleasure. "Ah, dear, brave old Bob. How I love him."

And now began an exchange of reminiscences between the two sisters.

Betty spoke feelingly about her frightful experiences in connection with her escape from the sanitarium.

Real sorrow dwelled in her young eyes as she spoke about the automobile wreck which cost four lives, including that of her brave rescuer.

"But why did you not stay at the home of Mr. Talbot after you were taken there?" Alice wanted to know.

"Because Mr. Talbot suspected that I was a relative of the Gordons at Oak Manor," Betty retorted. "And I knew that he had gone there to get Mr. Gordon. Had I known then what I know now—that I am innocent in the eyes of the world, I would have remained.

"You see, I was afraid that I would face arrest as soon as my identity had been established. I know it was an ungrateful act to leave the Talbot home without

even thanking him. But I had to do it under the circumstances."

Alice nodded understandingly. When her turn came to speak she did not seem quite so anxious to talk about her past. She spoke guardedly, always being careful to hide certain things.

Of one thing, however, she was sure. The plan which had found birth in her fertile brain would be a success if she proceeded cautiously.

She would not only again resume her position at the head of the Gordon household at Oak Manor.

Her most hated enemy, Marie Desmond, the beautiful governess, would be removed from the place she now held.

Chapter 142

A LETTER

PHILIP GORDON was recuperating at Oak Manor. Thanks to the efforts of a few loyal friends the shooting affair was given little publicity. The statement that he had accidentally shot himself was accepted generally by the newspapers, and only a few intimates knew the true facts.

Harold Wayne was supposedly traveling somewhere in the West, and it was rumored that he intended to make his home there. But those who knew him intimately, claimed that he had gone back to New York where he came from.

Gordon made a brave attempt to forget the incident, but he met with little success. He was constantly reminded of it by the absence of his guilty wife.

He was also reminded of it by his father-in-law, who appeared to be worried. John Procter could not understand why Alice should remain away from home for such an unusual length of time.

He refused to swallow the story that Philip had accidently shot himself.

John Procter knew something about the intimate relations which had existed between his daughter and Harold Wayne.

The sudden leaving of Alice, followed shortly after ward by a mysterious shooting affray, had aroused his suspicion.

His feeble health forbid physical exertion, and so he was compelled to await developments without being able to do anything.

Much of his time was spent hobbling through the grounds with the aid of a cane. Occasionally Phil would join him and then they would discuss the affair all over again.

Gordon was confronted by a very painful problem. He wanted to keep the kindly old gentleman in ignorance of the fact that he and Alice had separated for good.

He stuck to the story that his wife had gone to visit some of her girlhood friends.

"But when is she coming back?" John Procter demanded one evening as they were smoking together in the library.

The question was not an easy one to answer, but Phil did the best he could.

"You shouldn't worry about that, dad," he said soothingly. "I think a prolonged absence from home will do Alice a world of good. She needed a long vacation, and I don't want to spoil it by asking her to hurry back."

That settled the argument for the time being, and Gordon waited patiently for something to occur that would give him a chance to tell the truth without hurting his father-in-law.

For the present he enjoyed the quiet of his home. He had asked Marie Desmond to take charge of all the household affairs.

The governess had responded with her usual pleasant smile. She did the work splendidly in addition to teaching and taking care of the children.

Harry and Phyllis were both progressing nicely in their studies. They were both in radiant health now, and very, very happy.

"Why couldn't Alice have been like this remarkable woman?" Gordon would murmur to himself after

watching the children and their governess at play. "This Miss Desmond is a jewel. She is indispensable to me."

But when Phil expressed himself like this, he did not say half of what was in his heart. This strange governess was not only indispensable to him as a paid servant.

He had reached the point where he could not think of ever doing without her.

Like he had done on so many occasions, he drew comparisons between her and his first wife. But not for a moment did he suspect that she was in reality the woman he had loved so dearly and lost.

And so the days passed in that blissful domestic tranquility which is often marred by a rude jolt of fate.

One morning as old John Procter prepared to take his stroll through the grounds, a servant handed him a letter.

He turned the envelope over and glanced at the handwriting. He recognized it at once.

"That letter is from Alice," he muttered as he broke the seal hastily. "I wonder why she should write to me instead of her husband."

Tottering over to a chair he sank into it and began to read. The letter ran as follows:

Dear Dad:

I know you will be surprised to hear from me, but I feel that a frank confession is the best thing for all of us. I am sick of hiding the truth, and before I go any further, I want you to understand that I am sincerely sorry for all the unhappiness I have caused you.

Oh, I realize fully that I was to blame for much of the trouble at Oak Manor. But I have

been my own worst enemy.

There was a time when I was very happy with Phil. That was after we were first married. He was kind and attentive, and I had no cause for complaint.

But from the day Marie Desmond came to Oak Manor he was a changed man. I have more than a vague suspicion that he fell in love with this lovely governess.

Even you, dad, always spoke in that woman's favor. I know she possesses that strange charm for which most men fall. You and Phil stubbornly refused to look under the surface.

Had you taken the trouble to do so, you would have come to the conclusion that this Marie Desmond is a very smooth adventuress.

Don't forget, dad, dear, that it takes a woman to find out one of her sex. And I am making my assertions not because I dislike Marie Desmond, but because I have the right to warn you and Phil.

Now let me ask you a few questions, dad. Do you think it was fair to me when Phil deliberately defended this governess against me?

Was it right for him to sanction everything she said and did without consulting me, the mistress of the house?

Could you blame me for losing my temper when I saw that my own husband allowed himself to be duped by another woman, and a paid servant at that?

Phil must admit, if he wants to be honest about it, that he and I had little trouble before that Marie Desmond came to Oak Manor. Of course, we had a few little misunderstandings.

All married folk have them. But I could al-

ways smooth the wrinkles out of my husband's brow with a few kind words and a kiss.

When the governess came and took care of the children, she at once assumed an attitude that riled me. She even went so far as to insinuate that I was responsible for Harry's lilness.

She did so many other despicable things purposely to bring about a break between Phil and myself.

Conditions in our home were becoming unbearable. Phil constantly criticized me and quarreled with me in spite of the fact that I was looking forward to becoming a mother. It was heartless and cruel.

When the baby was born a weakling, I got the blame. Phil accused me of not having taken the proper care of myself. I resented it like any mother would. And then the baby died. Again I received the blame. I deserved some of it, but not all.

I confess that I was guilty of neglect. But no one knows the mental tortures I have endured since then. No one but God knows the bitter remorse which was mine.

I tried to forget it by plunging into a life of social gayety. With Phil's consent I invited some friends to Oak Manor.

And what did he do? In the presence of those friends he deliberately showed how he disdained me. His sneers nearly drove me frantic.

No woman, good or bad, will stand that sort of thing without resenting it. But even that would not have driven me to do what I did, had he not openly and continually mushed over that beautiful governess.

He told her the nice things he ought to have said to me. Whenever he spoke of her in my presence, it was in words of extravagant praise.

And then I did what any other neglected wife would have done. I encouraged other men to be nice to me.

I deliberately engaged Willard Parker to come to Oak Manor and make love to me. I know it was wrong, but I wanted to make Phil jealous.

Then Harold Wayne became our neighbor. He became to me what my husband should have been. And I am not ashamed to acknowledge that I nearly fell desperately in love with him.

But the end of that affair came suddenly and in a tragic manner. Phil caught me with Wayne in the pavilion one night. I was in his arms and I was coaxing him to take me away with him.

Now, dad, when a married woman deliberately begs another man to do that, she has gone pretty far, hasn't she?

Remember one thing, dad. No woman deliberately wants to be bad. Its the man that makes her so. But don't think that I am trying to shield myself by quoting this.

I was fully conscious of doing wrong at the time, and I felt fully justified.

I wanted Phil to know that if he did not want me, some other man did. But as is always the case, the woman gets the worst of it. When Phil caught me with Harold Wayne, he ordered me to leave the house instantly.

I did so, and before I left Oak Manor, I wrote you a note saying that I had gone to visit Grace Marshall, one of my girlhood friends.

I lied because I could not bear to cause you any

more grief. All the time I was away I remained with Mrs. Hendricks in Chicago. Then I heard that Phil had been shot by Harold Wayne during a quarrel.

I was on the point of coming home, but I soon changed my mind when I was informed that Miss Desmond was nursing him.

My stay at the home of Mrs. Hendricks was cut short because I refused to countenance the attentions of some of her men friends. They seemed to take it for granted that I was anybody's game.

I was inveigled into playing bridge and poker for high stakes, and lost every dollar I had.

And then, beggared and without friends—for I had a bitter quarrel with Mrs. Hendricks — I found myself suddenly alone and homeless.

It was then that I fully realized what a frightful mess I made of my life. And, dad, please don't look incredulous or smile with derision when I tell you that I learned to pray once more.

My only solace now lies in the hope that I may be given another chance. I want to come back to my husband and show him how good and true I can be. I want to come back to you, daddy, dear, and be the loving daughter you want me to be.

But I will do this only on one condition. This Marie Desmond must leave Oak Manor. Please make that plain to Phil. You can, dad, for your influence with my husband is great.

He will do almost anything you tell him. I promise faithfully to be a good mother to his two children. I know I can make Harry and Phyllis love me if I get the chance without outside interference.

And now, dad, I have some good news for

you. I have found a clue of our Betty. I know where she is hiding, and why. I know how happy you will be at the prospect of having your baby girl back.

That shall come to pass if you will help me regain the position which rightfully belongs to me.

In closing I can truthfully say that I still love Phil in spite of all that has happened. Tell him so, dad, and do your best to bring about a reconciliation between us.

With a world of longing and love,

Alice.

P. S. For got to tell you that I am staying at the old home on Ashland Boulevard. Please let me hear from you there.

John Procter allowed the letter to drop from his trembling hands without noticing it. His agitation could not be expressed in mere words. His wrinkled features contracted and a tear stole down his cheek.

"Thank God for that message!" he prayed. "Oh, thank God, for my one lost daughter has repented, and the other has been found!"

For a long while he sat in silence, his mind filled with pleasant thoughts and his heart swelling until it threatened to burst.

He believed that Alice was sincere, and he felt it his duty to help her. Yes, he would see Philip Gordon at once and intercede for his erring daughter.

But the prospect of a reconciliation between these two did not bring half the joy as the anticipation of folding Betty once more in his arms.

The excitement proved too much for him, for he leaned back with his eyes closed. The pallor of his face was so marked that when Marie Desmond entered the room a moment later she uttered a little shriek of fright.

"Why Mr. Procter," she cried, running to his side, "what is the matter? Are you ill?"

The old gentleman recovered quicky at sight of the lovely governess. She had always been kindness itself toward him. How could he request Gordon to discharge her because Alice asked it?

"I—I am perfectly well, Miss Desmond," he managed to stammer, then snatched the letter from the floor and placed it in his pocket. "Yes, I am quite well," he repeated with a whimsical smile. "But I do feel somewhat tired, my dear. Old age, you know. I think I'll lie down for a while."

"By all means do that," Marie urged. "And let me help you."

"No—no," Procter objected rather strenuously. "I'll get my man to do that. But you might find my son-in-law and ask him to come to my room at once. Will you do that for me, please?"

"Gladly," replied the governess, and disappeared.

Chapter 14

"I PROMISE!"

SOMEHOW Miss Desmond felt greatly disturbed as she went in search of Philip Gordon. What caused this strange feeling of unrest she could not tell. It was as though she had a premonition of danger. She knew where to find Phil at this hour of the day, and she walked rapidly toward the room he fondly called his den.

He was seated at a window with a far-away look in his eyes, but he forced a smile as she entered.

For a moment Marie forgot her errand. Her heart contracted sharply at the look of utter misery which even Phil's smile could not hide. True enough, his recovery from the wound inflicted by Wayne, was very slow.

But this could not be responsible for the expression on his face now.

Phil's suffering was purely mental, that she knew. And her whole heart went out to him in tender sympathy.

"I—I am glad you came in, Miss Desmond," he stammered in obvious confusion. "I was just thinking about you. Please sit down and keep me company for a little while."

Marie did not take the chair indicated by his hand, but remained standing.

"You—you do not look so well, Mr. Gordon," she said timidly, although her heart was yearning to comfort him as only a loving wife could. "I am afraid you are worrying."

He glanced at her curiously.

"What makes you think I am worrying?" he asked.

The question was not an easy one to answer for Marie. She had too much tact and delicacy to refer to Phil's unhappy life with his second wife. She grew confused and turned crimson at his continued scrutiny.

"Most men of affairs worry at times," she said lamely.

"Yes, they do," he agreed. "But mine are not only business worries. My troubles are greater than that."

"Can't I help you?" She spoke the words very slowly, and with a world of deep sympathy in them. "I would gladly do so if—if I could."

Gordon was very much impressed. For a moment a light blazed up in his eyes.

What he longed to say he dare not. He loved this unselfish, self-sacrificing woman. And how could he speak of love to her when he was still tied by law to another?

"No, I—I am afraid you can't help me," he remarked, meeting her glance for a second or two only. "I'll have to fight my way out of this mess alone.

"Well, at any rate, I'll soon be strong enough to go back to my office," he continued in a lighter tone. "What I need is plenty of work. I need that more than anything else right now. In fact I must have it."

Marie shook her pretty head.

"In this world we do not laways get what we want most," she declared. "You can not go back to your office unless the physician says so."

Phil rose from his chair then sat down again. He was becoming nervous from the strain of mastering himself in the presence of this beautiful woman.

Forbidden words trembled on his lips, and before

he could utter them Miss Desmond's voice reached his ears again.

"Mr. Procter would like to see you at once, Mr. Gordon," she told him. "You will find him in his room."

"Oh, is that so?" Phil replied, relieved. "Then I'll go up and call on him."

Before he could reach the door, the governess had already vanished.

With his head bowed and feeling a sense of anticipation, he walked slowly up the stairs. He found his father-in-law lying on the bed, fully dressed and propped up with pillows.

"Hello, dad!" he called cheerfully. "What a fine pair of invalids you and I are. I am moping around in my den while you play dead in this room. Come, let's snap out of it. What do you say?"

The old gentleman's smile was like a shadow slipping across his wrinkled features.

"I am glad you are so cheerful, my boy," he replied in a weary tone. "I am sorry I can't feel that way myself. My physical strength is about gone. When you get as old as I am, Phil, you'll——"

"Nonsense," Phil broke in. "I heard you say a good many times that a man is never any older than he feels."

"So I did," admitted Mr. Procter with a grin. "Well, according to that I must be about two hundred years old. Now sit down here, my boy," he added, all seriousness again. "I want to have a long chat with you."

"Alright, fire away, dad." Gordon took a seat on the edge of the bed.

John Procter reached into his pockets and brought forth an opened envelope.

"This," he said, turning to his son-in-law, "is a let-

ter from Alice. It came by this morning's mail and I can't tell you how surprised I was to hear from her."

Gordon averted his face.

"Phil," the old man spoke again, "you are not a very good liar. I suspected why my daughter left Oak Manor. And now this letter of hers confirms my suspicions. I want you to read it. Alice seems to be sorry for what she has done and she claims jealousy drove her to it."

"Jealousy of whom, dad?" he flared up.

"Miss Desmond, of course," the other answered. "Now please, read what she says."

Very reluctantly Gordon reached for the message from the woman he could never love again—the woman he had learned to abhor and despise.

It was only consideration for the old man which held him back from dashing the letter to the floor.

All his sentiments rebelled as he read her words. Even if she had been jealous of Miss Desmond, did that give her the right to drag his name with hers into the mire—to forget herself with another man?

Horror paralyzed him as he continued. Was it possible — Alice wished to come back to him? How could he live together with a woman whom he could not even respect, to say nothing of love?

He finished. Silently he handed the letter back to Mr. Proctr, who had watched him in feverish suspense and eagerness.

"Well?"

Phil did not look up, but his features betrayed his feelings?

"It cannot be," he said, "I cannot live with her again—it is impossible. I cannot forget or forgive what she has done. I do not comprehend the letter. She left here to marry Wayne, why has she so suddenly changed

her mind?"

"Because she sees her fault and repents. She says so in her letter," replied the old man. "I do not blame you Phil, but think what will happen! Will you give the world the sorry spectacle of your domestic troubles in the divorce courts? By God, it would be my death!"

"Phil, she is still your wife and bears your name. ings of the parent defending his child—but it was impossible.

"Think my boy," Mr. Procter pleaded, "how peaceful and happy my last few years may be if you are reunited—I have not much longer to live. And then my Betty. Oh, the joy of having her again! Phil, you will take her back again? You will forgive her?"

Gordon groaned. He was deeply moved by the appeal of the poor old man.

"I cannot," he said, "I cannot. It can not result in peace or happines for us. I have no faith in Alice's repentance, dad, we two are not suited to each other. It would be a further misfortune."

"Phil, sh is still your wife and bears your name. If you desert her now, God knows what she may become. Shall I go to the grave knowing her to be without any protection—without any control? Or—do you object so to her return because she asks that Miss Desmond leave the house? Is she more to you than my daughter, Phil?"

"Please, dad," exclaimed Phil, touched to the quick, "I beg you, do not bring Miss Desmond into this talk. There can be no reconcilation between me and Alice. She has gone too far. Even while she was here, we had no common ground to meet on.

"What does she want now, to renew my misery and make my heart ache still more? No, I am weary of it—leave me in peace, and it is better for her if she does

not came back here."

"Oh, God!" groaned the old man in desperation. "It will be my death. In refusing to take her back, you place her in the public pillory. Phil, you will not do this! At least promise me that Alice may be with you while I live, do not refuse me this."

Gordon shook his head.

"No, I cannot do it. Ask anything else but not that. I cannot respect her, and I would not have one kind word for her if she were here—not for my life."

Mr. Procter covered his face. He had played on Phil's affection for himself in asking him to take back Alice at least during his life time.

"If he lets her come back," he had thought, "they will make peace, and he will never think of letting her go again." His little plan, however, had failed and he was hopeless.

"Leave me," he begged in dull tones, "I must rest. Think it over, my boy, perhaps you will do it for my sake."

The lump in Phil's throat prevented him from answering. Silently and deeply grieved, he left the room.

Would he ever find peace? Could he bear to have the frivolous woman who had made life a hell for him, beside him again? No,—never again!

Another thought — a new anxiety oppressed his heart. They conspired against Miss Desmond, and would rob his children of their second mother!

Where would the poor children find such care and love again? And with her, the sunlight would go out of his life forever. No, he could not consent.

Racked by his thoughts and feelings, he paced about his room.

He grieved for the old man, but understood Alice

better than her father.

She would bring to him his lost daughter only if he effected her return to Oak Manor! This condition was clear from her letter.

Only too well, Phil knew her character and penetrated her low hypocricy. He could guess why she had broken with Harold Wayne and now, having nowheres to go, begged to return to Oak Manor. No, he would not become the tool of this scheming woman.

He would tell her that he saw through her plans and express his contempt for her. He sat down at once and wrote Alice a letter in which he told her the plain truth, aiming to remove every hope she might entertain for a reconciliation.

During her father's life, she was free to come to Oak Manor and see him, but between himself and her, all was over.

If she had any remnant of self-respect, she would not make another attempt to thrust herself upon him. He dispatched the letter and felt easier at his energetic action.

The day's troubles, however, were not over. In the evening Mr. Procter became so ill that Dr. Van Buren had to be called. The latter seemed very anxious.

"He must have had a severe mental shock," he said to Gordon who took him to the old man.

"He did," nodded Phil gloomily.

"His condition is serious, and any excitement may bring on his end. His life hangs by a thread. In any case, I think your wife should be notified."

Phil shrank back.

He thought of the letter he had just sent — and now was he to call her to her father? He nodded mutely and bent over his father-in-law who lay before him with eyes closed, struggling for breath.

Suddenly the old man looked at him. His eyes brightened and it was clear that he had recovered consciousness.

"Phil, I wish to see my children—do not let me die without my having blessed them. Call Alice and make her bring Betty before—before—it is—too late."

"Do everything he asks," urged Dr. Van Buren, "Any contradiction may excite him and kill him."

"Yes, dad, I will do so." Gordon consented at last.

With a great effort Mr. Procter caught Phil's hand. "Another prayer. For my sake, receive Alice again. Do it for me—I will not find rest until I know you are reconciled; promise me——"

"Dad, do not insist, I cannot do it," groaned Phil despairingly.

With a sigh the old man fell back on the pillows. His face changed terribly; he looked like a corpse.

"For heaven's sake, will you kill him?" adjured the doctor. "Don't you see how he suffers? Have pity for him—you may regret it."

"Doctor, you have heard what he demands. I cannot!"

"You must! There is no help—you must promise! His life is in your hands."

Cold drops gathered on Phil's brow.

He looked wildly about him. He thought of the consequences which must proceed from his promise.

His eyes fell on the old man; he saw the sufferings in his features; heard his struggle for breath—and suddenly—pity for him shoved all other considerations into the back grounds.

Obeying the impulse of the moment, he leaned over the sick man and said hoarsely:

"Do not worry, dad, I will do as you ask—I promise you."

A happy smile spread over the pain-racked features. In an over-flow of joy he wished to thank Phil, but he could not utter a sound. Two great tears rolled down his face.

"God bless you, my son," he finally managed to say. Then in a few moments he added: "You will—be good to Alice and—take her back, won't you,—Miss Desmond—she will go? I know it is—a great sacrifice—to take back—Alice—but——"

"I promise—I promise—everything," said Phil brokenly; an expression of pain and despair was on his face. That was the hardest of all—to banish Miss Desmond—harder than receiving Alice again. But it could not be helped. He must grit his teeth and bear his burden like a man.

"You—you—make me happy," said Mr. Procter and lay back contentedly. "Oh, now I will see my Betty again—oh, how I long for the poor child! Phil, will you go for both?"

"If you wish it, I will go to Chicago myself."

The shadow of a smile passed over the face of the aged man—exhausted he closed his eyes.

Dazed and bewildered, Phil rose and made for the door. Dr. Van Buren followed him with concern; his face was strangely set.

"Is it possible— they want Miss Desmond to make place for Gordon's wife?" he murmured to himself. "This is unheard of,"

Now he comprehended the struggle in Phil's soul against granting his father-in-law's prayer. He was depriving his children of their devoted guardian, and himself, perhaps, of something much more dear.

But now he would soon know whether Miss Desmond was not the former Marie Gordon. He felt sure that, rather than leave her children, she would unmask

and claim her rights.

But if she submitted and left, she could not be the children's mother and he could be certain that he had been misled by the strange resemblance. Soon everything would be made clear!

Dr. Van Buren straightened up and resolution showed in his features. If Marie left Oak Manor, he would hesitate no longer, but speak freely and openly and ask her to be his wife.

Perhaps the happiness he had longed for would be his, and Marie would become his wife. How he would love and cherish her; protect her from all sorrow and trouble, shield her from all dangers!

Chapter 144

HAWKINS' VALET

SO FAR AS winning the lovely young Lillian Crawford for a bride, Roger Hawkins' yacht trip proved a complete failure. The girl had steadfastly refused to leave her cabin during the entire week spent sailing across Lake Michigan and back again.

And what a good thing it was, for the owner of the pleasure craft was determined to win her by foul means since others proved futile.

And in this he had been promised the assistance of the girl's stepmother.

Twice Hawkins had attempted to gain access to Lillian's cabin, and once he nearly succeeded. Seeing themselves thwarted at every turn, Mrs. Crawford and Hawkins decided to return to Chicago.

It was the night just before they landed that these two separated from the rest of the guests for another of their intimate chats.

Roger Hawkins appeared to be cheerful in spite of his rebuffs. He felt confident that he would have his own way with Lillian sooner or later.

In fact there did not seem any doubt about it because her step-mother eagerly sanctioned any move he desired to make.

"I can see by your face that you are not discouraged, Roger," Mrs. Crawford said in a low voice. "Well, that is right. Faint heart never won fair lady, you know."

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Failure is a word not in my vocabulary, my dear Mrs. Crawford," he replied. "I love Lillian and I'll make her my wife if I have to kidnap her and carry her off to the Fiji Islands."

The woman nodded and smiled.

"I like that spirit in you, Roger," she told him. "But you will have to be careful so Victor Talbot don't beat you to it. We must not forget that he is also a very determined man."

Hawkins grinned derisively.

"No cause for worry there," was his confident retort. "I don't think Mr. Talbot will give us any more trouble."

Mrs. Crawford glanced at him keenly.

There was something in the speaker's face that gave her a sudden shock. She moved a little closer and placed a hand on her companion's arm.

"What makes you think that, Roger?" she inquired tensely.

Instantly Hawkins regretted his words. This woman was desperately in love with Victor Talbot.

What if she found out that he had thrown the man overboard in a deliberate attempt to murder him? The situation required extreme caution.

"I think that our friend Talbot has sense enough to realize that his chances with Lillian are gone," he remarked quietly. "He knew that I was taking her away on this trip, and he did not make the least attempt to prevent it. A man who truly loves a girl won't let her get into the hands of a rival so easy."

"Yes, you are right about that," responded Mrs. Crawford thoughtfully.

"We can bring this matter to a close if you follow my suggestion," the man went on. "You must let me stay at your country home for a few weeks. Give me

plenty of chances to be alone with Lillian, and I'll do the rest."

"By all means," acquiesced the woman promptly. "You can drive us home to night and remain."

"That suits me very well, Mrs. Crawford. I hope you won't mind if I take my valet with me. I am so used to his services that I am afraid I won't be able to get along without him."

"Why, certainly," came back quickly.

Here the conversation ended because several of the guests approached to inquire how soon the landing would take place.

The owner of the yacht gave the information very pleasantly.

In less than an hour later the yacht glided gracefully up to her pier.

Lillian came ashore with her stepmother. It could easily be seen that these two had been quarreling.

The young girl frowned darkly as Hawkins assisted her into the taxi. Mrs. Crawford followed and then he jumped in. His valet rose with the driver.

During the trip to the Crawford estate Lillian remained silent.

The conversation carried on between Hawkins and her stepmother interested her very little. Her mind was filled with whirling thoughts and her young heart beat with dread.

For she had been informed that the man she despised was to be a guest at her home for at least two weeks.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in the fact that Mr. Roger Hawkins established himself in the spa-

cious country home of the Crawfords. Things like that happened quite frequently in the neighborhood where city folk were wont to visit.

He had been given his own suite of rooms which he occupied with the man he called his valet.

There was a state of peculiar intimacy between master and servant as we see them together.

Hawkins' features wore a dark scowl as he made an almost childish attempt to reprimand the man because he demanded an increase in his pay.

"I am paying you enough now, Frank," he complained. "I don't like the idea of being held up for more money."

The valet grinned impudently as he replied:

"You are not paying me half enough, Hawkins. And don't forget what you promised me the night I helped you throw Talbot overboard. You——"

"For heaven's sake, hush!" the other whispered in a tone of fright. "Alright, I'll give you what you ask for, and I hope you'll be satisfied. But whatever you do, never mention that affair again. Your very life as well as my own depend upon the strictest silence."

Frank pocketed the bills his master handed over and nodded.

"Don't worry, old top," he said in a guarded tone. "I won't be likely to squeal."

That ended the discussion of the subject for the time being.

Hawkins seemed to have changed his tactics in dealing with Lillian Crawford. He demeaned himself toward her like a gentleman upon all occasions.

The young girl accepted his attentions with less reluctance. In fact she did not seem to fear Hawkins as she had formerly done.

Her obviously happy frame of mind was the

source of considerable speculation to her stepmother as well as the man the latter had chosen for a son-in-law.

Had they been more watchful during certain hours of the night, they would have seen the young girl slip quietly from her room into the darkness to keep her tryst with someone not believed to be in the neighborhood.

Roger Hawkins, absolutely sure that Victor Talbot rested peacefully at the bottom of Lake Michigan, received the shock of his life when he learned that his hated rival had been seen alive and well.

He at once called his trusted valet into a conference.

"It is up to you to find out if there is any truth in the rumor," he said, greatly disturbed. "I'll pay you an extra hundred in spot cash if you get that information for me within twenty-four hours."

The man quickly accepted the proposition and departed.

That same evening Hawkins, driven by a feeling of restlessness, took a walk past the Talbot estate. He had gone but a short distance when he saw a man on horseback coming toward him.

"By God!" he gasped, and stopped dead in his tracks.

The next instant the horse was pulled up sharply and the man jumped lightly from the saddle.

"Well, Hawkins, we meet again, don't we?" Victor Talbot spoke the words in a cold, menacing tone. "The next time you try to drown anybody be sure that you use a stronger drug. I ought to hand you over to the police for attempted murder, and I would, if it would not create no end of scandal."

With amazing swiftness Hawkins regained his composure.

"You are doing me an injustice, my friend," he answered without batting an eye. "If you fell overboard it was because of your own carelessness. I had absolutely nothing to do with it."

"That is a barefaced lie and you know it!" Talbot shot back. "But let it go at that. The reason you are still alive to-day is because you did not lay your filthy hands on Lillian Crawford. And it is for her sake that I am keeping this thing quiet."

"How chivalrous," sneered the other. "But why so considerate if you are sure you have a good case against me?"

Talbot walked up to his enemy and looked him squarely in the eyes.

For a moment it seemed that he was about to make use of his twitching fingers, for they were aimed at Hawkins' neck.

Suddenly he dropped his hands.

"No, I'll not strangle you, although you deserve to be," he said quietly. "But I'll kill you as sure as God is above us if you ever cross me again. Miss Crawford is my affianced wife and I warn you to keep away from her. Confine your love-making to her step-mother. She is your kind."

Roger Hawkins utter a laugh that was utterly devoid of merriment. He measured Talbot with a cold, defiant glance.

"I suppose you are foolish enough to believe that I will heed your warning," he cried. "Well, I have no such intentions. I have Mrs. Crawford's consent to marry the girl, and I'll go through with it."

A moment of intense silence followed. Both men were becoming more and more excited.

"Listen to me," Talbot said at length, his voice coming with an effort. "You are the kind of a man who

manages to get a lot of pleasure out of life. And no doubt you hope to live for a good many years to come.

"But the day you try to force Lillian into a marriage with you, you'll die as sure as we are standing here. You remember that, Hawkins. What I am saying to you now is no idle threat."

Without another word, or waiting for a reply, he walked over to his horse and jumped into the saddle.

There was little joy in Hawkins' black heart as he returned home.

Mrs. Crawford and Lillian were sitting on the front veranda. He nodded to one and smiled at the other, then went up to his room.

It was not until he threw himself into a chair that he noticed the presence of his valet.

"Get out, Frank!" he commanded gruffly. "I want to be alone."

The man coughed slightly but made no move to go. This angered Hawkins.

"Get out!" he shouted.

"But—but I have some important news for you," the other protested.

"You have, eh?" Hawkins scowled. "Well, what is it?"

"I saw Talbot, and I want to collect that hundred you promised me," came back.

Hawkins forced a hollow laugh. He was not in a mood for an argument. Neither had the least inclination to pay that sum of money for an unwelcome bit of information he already possessed.

"Your too damned slow, Frank," he growled. "I had the pleasure of meeting the man face to face. Now get out and leave me alone."

Frank retained his position.

"But I need that hundred and I want it," he de-

clared.

"Not a chance in the world of getting it," was the angry retort. "Now let us understand each other. You bled me long enough. I won't stand for any more of it. If you feel that you must put your head in the noose, go ahead. Squeal to your heart's content and we'll see who gets the worst of it."

"Do you mean that, Hawkins?" the valet had taken a quick step forward and stood in front of his master.

"I sure do!" replied the latter.

"Alright," returned Frank. "But I won't squeal to the police. Oh, no. What I'll do is spoil your game here. I guess Miss Crawford won't care much about marrying you when I tell her what kind of a skunk you are."

That was too much for Hawkins.

He was on his feet in an instant. His valet was a much smaller man and no match for him in a fight. When his fist shot out with lightning swiftness, Frank crumpled up in a heap on the floor.

And the punishment did not end there. With fierce brutality the prostrate man was beaten until his face resembleld a raw piece of beef.

Then Hawkins jerked him up by the collar and dumped him on a chair.

"I guess that will hold you for a while!" he snarled. "I'll teach you what it means to threaten me. If you ever open your mouth to Miss Crawford, I'll beat you to death."

The poor fellow could not make a retort because his swollen lips and tongue could not move.

But there was a terrible look in his rat-eyes. When he finally gained enough strength to rise, he staggered into the bathroom and washed the blood from his face.

Hawkins coolly rearranged his tie and coat, then left the room. Nothing about his exterior betrayed his altercation with the valet.

Mrs. Crawford greeted him cordially, but Lillian became more deeply interested in the book she was reading. As she glanced up at him she caught a peculiar grin on his face.

Then, as if touched by a wave of mental telepathy, she rose and went indoors.

"I am glad we are alone, Mrs. Crawford," Hawkins began at once. "I am tired of being rebuffed by that girl. Unless our engagement is publicly announced within a week, I'll leave."

"It shall be announced," the woman responded eagerly as she showed him a slip of paper which contained a list of names. "I am making arrangements right now for a reception here next Thursday. Please don't worry about that, my dear boy. I think I have about convinced Lilllian that you are the man for her."

The smile on Hawkins' face expressed extreme pleasure.

"How did you manage it," he inquired.

"By the application of common sense," was the retort. "I quit nagging her about marrying you. Of course, your own treatment of her helped a lot. I am sure she won't object if the engagement is announced now."

And while these two made their plans, another mind was busy framing one to checkmate theirs. Frank, the valet, alone in his room, was hurling maledictions and terrible threats. His heart yearned for revenge upon the man who had so brutally beaten him.

His mind was made up for revenge and his eyes shone as he made plans to carry out this revenge.

Continued in next number

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